

SB 16
Testimony by Commissioner Sheila Stearns

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee:

For the record I am Sheila Stearns, Commissioner of Higher Education.

I rise in support of this bill to authorize, through a vote of the people of Montana, a continuation of the historical six-mill levy in support of the Montana University System.

The six-mill levy is well-known in Montana, and since 1948 has been approved every ten years by percentages ranging from about 55% to 65%. The Board of Regents are confident that the voters, if given this opportunity, will once again in November of 2008 endorse this statewide support for the units of the Montana University System.

My father-in-law, the late Hal Stearns, worked on behalf of the six-mill levy in each election from 1948 to 1998. He led the effort in the 1978 and 1988 elections, traveling to every county in the state in the process. Hal died two years ago this April, but I know he is watching over my shoulder to make sure that on my watch, and yours, that the people of Montana once again have the opportunity to give Montana's higher education a pat on the back and the financial support that they need.

I will be happy to answer questions.